



# KEEPING SAFE

The staff who keep our hospitals clean and who help combat the spread of superbugs like Clostridium Difficile (C-Diff) are key to the safety of patients, their families and hospital staff.

However UNISON's research has shown growing evidence that the chemicals staff work with are damaging their health. The main problem is chlorine containing products. When not used safely, these can cause side effects such as breathing difficulties and asthma that make staff ill.

These products and other chemicals are used in all sorts of settings, causing problems for staff in many workplaces, mainly in hospitals and care homes.

UNISON is very clear – no one should be made ill by the work they do and we will continue to ensure that employers properly take on board their responsibility to minimise the risks to staff working with these chemicals.

## What is UNISON doing?

UNISON knows that combating superbugs and keeping people safe from infections and harm is a top priority, but so is the safety of staff. That is why we are calling for employers to look at safer alternatives to these chemicals to protect their staff. And where that is not possible we want employers to ensure that:

- chemicals are prepared properly using the correct quantities and mixed with water of the right temperature. All of these chemicals come with a safety data sheet that explains how they must be prepared and used
- they provide safe working environments such as well ventilated rooms
- staff have well maintained and correctly fitted personal protective equipment such as goggles and masks
- all staff are properly trained and instructed so that they use these chemicals safely.

Where this isn't happening we will take action to protect our members and the public. We helped 22 cleaners win a case against their employer – a health trust in Devon – for failing to take the proper measures to protect the safety of their staff.

We are also calling on the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) to provide clear and unambiguous guidance and to reintroduce proactive inspections to check that employers are getting it right and keeping their staff safe.

## What should you do?

If you are working with these chemicals you must follow the rules for the safe use of these products. If you are worried about a lack of training, or you are working in unsafe conditions without the proper safety equipment, you should speak to your UNISON safety rep who will take this up on your behalf.

**For further information or to see a copy of our research findings  
*Keeping Clean and Keeping Safe*, go to [www.unison.org.uk/safety](http://www.unison.org.uk/safety)  
or call us free on 0800 0 857 857.**

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